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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CHIANG MAI 000177

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [BM](#) [TH](#)  
SUBJECT: [THOUGH PESSIMISTIC ABOUT OUTCOMES, IRRAWADDY STAFF PRAISE](#)  
U.S. BURMA POLICY IN DISCUSSION WITH AMBASSADOR

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CLASSIFIED BY: Alex Barrasso, Chief, Pol/Econ, CG Chiang Mai.  
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

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Summary  
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11. (C) In a discussion with The Ambassador on November 18, staff at the Irrawaddy Magazine - the most widely-read Burmese exile media outfit - praised the conclusions of the U.S. policy review on Burma, while simultaneously expressing skepticism the GoB would take steps to address core U.S. concerns. Imploring the U.S. to push forward by engaging all stakeholders, Irrawaddy Editor Aung Zaw characterized the policy as "comprehensive" and non-discriminatory. Despite this endorsement, everyone agreed that the regime was unlikely to work to redress Burma's ills.  
End Summary.

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The Right Policy  
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12. (C) The Ambassador opened the 45-minute meeting by sharing the conclusions of the U.S. policy review and asking the assembled Irrawaddy journalists for their views on the situation in Burma. Aung Zaw praised the more nuanced approach and the inclusion of engagement in the U.S. toolkit, noting that the policy had "injected new energy" in Jakarta, Bangkok, Rangoon and Brussels. The policy "does not discriminate and is comprehensive," he remarked, imploring the U.S. to press forward with engaging all stakeholders. The Ambassador reaffirmed that we intend to continue talking to all parties involved, both inside and outside Burma.

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Campbell Visit Positive  
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13. (C) Observing A/S Campbell's November 3-4 visit to Burma had been positively received in virtually all circles, Aung Zaw inquired when he would next go to Burma. The Ambassador noted that subsequent discussion had not been scheduled, and that the visit had been designed to build on the meeting A/S Campbell held with U Thaung on the margins of the UNGA. Aung Zaw remarked that perhaps an interlocutor with more experience than U Thaung could help broaden the dialogue to areas such as counternarcotics cooperation and humanitarian assistance. "You need to continue using both carrots and sticks," another reporter opined.

14. (C) Turning specifically to U.S. engagement, Aung Zaw stated that one unintended consequence was that the regime thought it now had more leverage in its dealings with the EU, China and Japan as a result; U.S. engagement allowed the GoB to attempt to play them all off against each other. Nonetheless, Aung Zaw stated that according to a prominent Burmese businessman with connections to the regime, A/S Campbell's visit had significant potential. The businessman told him that after the visit, Senior General Than Shwe asked for a comprehensive and historical report about the U.S.-Burma relationship. The Ambassador reaffirmed that we would continue to engage key partners in Europe and Asia to coordinate policy approaches and advance mutual interests in Burma.

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2010 and Than Shwe  
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15. (C) In response to The Ambassador's question about the most optimistic scenario for the 2010 elections, Aung Zaw expressed pessimism that the Burmese regime would take steps to amend the 2008 Constitution and level the playing field. Release of 500-800 key political prisoners and a more pragmatic approach by the National League for Democracy in advance of the 2010 elections are the most we can hope for, he opined. He did, however, hold out hope that Aung San Suu Kyi could be released or that a true dialogue with her could commence due to Senior General Than Shwe's desire to leave a positive legacy. If she is released, Aung Zaw remarked, the U.S. will welcome it, but ethnic minority populations will still live in jungles, and refugees will continue crossing into Thailand.

16. (C) All four Irrawaddy journalists expressed uncertainty with regard to what Than Shwe hoped to gain from a dialogue with the U.S. One said he wants to preserve his family's wealth and the military's power. Another opined that he wants international sanctions lifted and the international community's respect. Yet another speculated that he may just be buying time to further consolidate his power, while readily admitting that "we don't know what he wants. Does the U.S.?"

17. (U) Ambassador John approved this cable.  
MORROW